

# codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE  
ORGANIZATION  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD  
HEALTH  
ORGANIZATION



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**CX2/20.2(57th)**

**CL 2005/9 -EXEC  
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**TO:** Codex Contact Points  
Interested International Organizations

**FROM:** Secretary, Codex Alimentarius Commission  
Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme  
FAO, 00100 Rome, Italy

**SUBJECT:** **Requests for Comments for the preparation of the Strategic Plan 2008-2013**

**DEADLINE:** **10 July 2005**

**COMMENTS:** To:  
Secretary, Codex Alimentarius Commission  
Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme – FAO  
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## BACKGROUND

As agreed by the 27<sup>th</sup> Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission<sup>1</sup>, the Executive Committee, at its 55<sup>th</sup> Session, discussed the structure and format for a new Strategic plan covering a six year period of 2008-2013 as well as the ways to further proceed with the development of the Strategic Plan. The Committee noted the proposed structure and format of the new Plan comprising three Parts<sup>2</sup> and confirmed that the current Strategic Framework as well as elements of the draft Medium-Term Plan 2003-2007 would provide a useful basis to the preparation of the Strategic Plan 2008-2013.

The Executive Committee generally supported the process and timetable for the preparation of the Plan as proposed in the working document and agreed that a working group, comprising the Chairperson and three Vice Chairpersons to be elected by the 28<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission, should prepare a preliminary draft of the Strategic Plan, with assistance from the Codex Secretariat, for consideration at the 57<sup>th</sup> Session of the Executive Committee.

The Executive Committee also agreed that in order to ensure early inputs from Codex Members and Observers in the development of the Strategic Plan, a Circular Letter be issued to request comments on areas in which the current Strategic Framework was considered insufficient or needed to be improved or strengthened. The comments received would be used by the working group when elaborating the preliminary draft.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ALINORM 04/27/41 para. 123

<sup>2</sup> CX/EXEC 05/55/2 Part I

<sup>3</sup> ALINORM 05/28/3 paras 6-14

## **REQUEST FOR COMMENTS**

Governments and interested International Organizations are invited to comment on areas in which the Strategic Framework 2003-2007 is considered insufficient or needs to be improved or strengthened, preferably by an email, and **no later than 10 July 2005**. The current Strategic Framework is attached as Annex.

## **CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2003-2007**

### **STRATEGIC VISION STATEMENT**

*The Codex Alimentarius Commission envisages a world afforded the highest attainable levels of consumer protection, including food safety and quality. To this end, the Commission will develop internationally agreed standards and related texts for use in domestic regulation and international trade in food that are based on scientific principles and fulfil the objectives of consumer health protection and fair practices in food trade.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

1. This document sets out the strategic priorities for the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) and provides the basis for the elaboration of the Medium Term Plan for the period 2003-2007. The strategic vision and goals for Codex underpin the high priority attached to food safety by its parent organizations, the FAO and the WHO. The FAO Strategic framework for 2000-2015 accords high priority to promoting policy and regulatory frameworks for food at the international and national levels. Similarly the 53rd Session of the World Health Assembly recognized the need to highlight health considerations in international food trade and acknowledged the importance of the CAC for assuring the highest levels of consumer health protection. The resolution also urged WHO to work towards integrating food safety as one of its essential public health functions with the goal of developing sustainable, integrated food safety systems for the reduction of health risk along the entire food chain. The fundamental mandate of the CAC is to develop international standards and norms for consumer health protection and fair practices in the food trade.
2. The CAC has always operated in an environment of change and technological advancement. The growth in world food trade, advances in modern communication and increasing mobility of populations are all contributing to elevating the profile and significance of food safety and regulation. There is growing international concern related to a perceived emergence/increase in food-borne diseases. Consumers around the world are becoming more aware than ever about food safety issues and are seeking ever-greater assurances about the safety and quality of foods they eat. Innovation and the development of new processes (including modern biotechnology) are leading to the development of new products with specific medical, nutritional and functional attributes. In its endeavour to promote food safety and quality, the CAC needs to consider opportunities for strengthening partnerships with all stakeholders, in particular consumers and their representative organizations, at the global and national levels. A further development is the growing interest in organic foods, which are likely to capture a significant share of the international market in the future. It is also likely that developing countries will account for an increasing proportion of global food and agricultural trade. These developments, while exciting, also present new challenges (both safety and non safety) for the CAC and national governments.
3. The new recognition and status that Codex standards, guidelines and other recommendations acquired under the WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the SPS Agreement) also brought new challenges and responsibilities including the need to ensure that its standards and related texts are based on scientific principles and meet the needs and mandate of the organization. The WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade is also of great relevance given the significance of the provisions pertaining to product description, labelling, packaging and quality descriptors for consumer information and fair practices in trade. Although quality provisions are fundamentally driven by the market, the CAC has an important role in ensuring that provisions relating to quality are sound and based on the criteria of essentiality and do not constitute disguised barriers to trade.
4. These developments have generated renewed interest in the work of the CAC and have resulted in a substantial growth in membership of the organization with developing countries now accounting for a

majority of total membership. Given the importance that the WTO attaches to international harmonization, there is now an even greater imperative for CAC and its members to ensure that the Organization maintains its pre-eminent status as the internationally recognized body for food standards and its norms are applied to the widest extent possible by all members as a basis for domestic regulation and international trade.

## **DECISION-MAKING BASED ON SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE**

5. The scientific basis of decision-making by the CAC is spelt out in the Statements of Principle on the Role of Science in the Codex Decision-Making and the Extent to which Other Factors are Taken into Account<sup>4</sup>. The CAC does not undertake scientific evaluations *per se* but relies on the opinions of scientific expert Committees or Consultations convened by FAO and WHO on specific issues. These expert bodies such as the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committees on Food Additives, the Joint FAO/WHO Meetings on Pesticide Residues and the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meeting on Microbiological Risk Assessments are independent of the CAC and its subsidiary bodies and do not fall within the scope of the present Strategic Framework. The mandates, functions, composition and agendas of these bodies are established by FAO and WHO. Although the independence of the expert bodies is critical to the objectivity of their opinions, meetings of these bodies normally take into account the advice of the CAC as indicated in Article 1 of the Commission's Statutes. There is considerable synergy between the scientific panels of FAO and WHO and the intergovernmental bodies of the CAC in order to take decisions based on scientific evidence.

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES**

6. The fundamental objective of the Codex Alimentarius Commission is to establish sound internationally agreed guidelines for national food control systems based on the criteria of consumer health protection and fair practices in trade and taking into account the needs and special concerns of all countries. All of the objectives listed below are considered to be equally important to the overall achievement of the strategic vision.

### **OBJECTIVE 1: PROMOTING SOUND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK**

7. In many countries, effective food control is undermined by the existence of fragmented legislation, multiple jurisdictions and weaknesses in surveillance, monitoring and enforcement. Sound national food control and regulatory systems are essential to assuring the health and safety of domestic population as well as assuring the safety and quality of foods entering international trade. While the establishment of regulatory framework is fundamentally a national responsibility, the CAC and its parent bodies, the FAO and WHO, have a strong interest in promoting national regulatory systems that are based on international principles and guidelines and address all components of the food chain. The development of sound food control and regulatory infrastructure including human resources is particularly important for developing countries as they seek to achieve higher levels of food safety and nutrition and will require high level political and policy commitment as highlighted in the report of the 1999 Melbourne Conference on International Food Trade Beyond 2000.<sup>5</sup> An effective food control system is critical in enabling all countries to assure the safety of their foods entering international trade and to ensure that imported foods conform to national requirements. Successful negotiation of bilateral mutual recognition and/or equivalence also depends on the ability of countries to assure each other of the integrity of national regulatory systems.
8. The priorities for the CAC in the development of international standards and related texts will be to:
  - provide essential guidance for member countries through the continued development of international standards and guidelines relating to food safety and hygiene, nutrition, labelling and import/export inspection and certification systems and for the practical application of the concepts of equivalence and mutual recognition ; and

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<sup>4</sup> Codex Alimentarius Commission, Procedural Manual, Eleventh Edition, p.180.

<sup>5</sup> Report of the Conference on International Food Trade beyond 2000: Science based Decisions, Harmonization, Equivalence and Mutual Recognition, Melbourne, Australia, 11-15 October, 1999, Appendix 1, p.29.

- promote the development of national food control systems based on international principles and criteria for the reduction of health risk along the entire food chain.

**OBJECTIVE 2: PROMOTING WIDEST AND CONSISTENT APPLICATION OF SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLES AND RISK ANALYSIS**

9. The CAC will promote and further strengthen its capacity to include health considerations in its standards and guidelines through the widest possible application of risk analysis based on Codex principles. Risk analysis as it applies to food, is an emerging discipline and will require ongoing and sustained inputs from the Commission, its parent organizations and national governments to promote conceptual development and application at the international and national levels. Risk Communication will be vital to this process. The early implementation of the CAC Action Plan on Risk Analysis by the Commission and member governments is essential to:
  - promoting the consistent application of risk analysis principles throughout all of the work of Codex system;
  - achieve strengthened international capacity for risk assessment including those related to microbiological hazards and dealing with emerging pathogens;
  - improving understanding of risk analysis concepts, principles and application at the national level especially for developing countries through targeted technical assistance and cooperation,
  - promoting greater transparency of the whole risk analysis process;
  - improving understanding of how precaution and scientific uncertainty are factored and taken into account in the risk analysis process;
  - Strengthening risk communication; and
  - Promoting the collection of data from developing countries and from all regions of the world so that the risk analysis is based on global conditions and requirements.
10. The CAC will also need to accord high priority to ongoing development of concepts and principles and the establishment of sound working principles for the application of risk analysis both at international and national levels. It should also promote better understanding of risk analysis through technical assistance programmes. A strengthened expert scientific evaluation structure for addressing chemical, microbiological hazards and emerging pathogens will also be critical to support and underpin the Codex standards development processes.
11. Consistent with the Statements of Principle, adopted by CAC in 1995, the Commission will need to have due regard, where appropriate, to other legitimate factors relevant to health protection of consumers and for the promotion of fair practices in food trade when developing standards and guidelines. International consensus on the scope and application of other legitimate factors in Codex decision making will be essential for their sound and consistent application right across the Codex system.

**OBJECTIVE 3: PROMOTING LINKAGES/ BETWEEN CODEX AND OTHER MULTILATERAL REGULATORY INSTRUMENTS AND CONVENTIONS**

12. The CAC does not and cannot operate in isolation. It needs to work closely with other relevant international standards setting and regulatory bodies to promote close cooperation and dialogue on matters of common interest. As the WTO-recognized international body for establishing food safety standards the Commission has a clear obligation to establish international food standards for the protection of consumers' health and ensuring fair practices in food trade, and these standards may be used by Member countries in both domestic regulation and international trade. At the same time the Commission needs to interact closely with related international bodies. and take due account of international regulatory initiatives and developments thereby promoting coordination of all food standards work undertaken by international governmental and nongovernmental organizations. Such cooperation is also important to minimize duplication of effort. Food safety and issues such as biotechnology are of global interest and are the subjects of debate and discussion in a number of multilateral institutions. The CAC has, by virtue of its lead role in international food standards, a strategic interest in working closely with relevant multilateral institutions and conventions to provide

its technical input and expertise and contribute to building international consensus on contemporary food standards and regulatory policy matters.

**OBJECTIVE 4: ENHANCE CAPACITY TO RESPOND EFFECTIVELY AND EXPEDITIOUSLY TO NEW ISSUES, CONCERNS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FOOD SECTOR**

13. With the rapid development of technology and emergence of food safety as a major issue of public policy, there is a need to enhance the capacity of Codex to respond to members' needs in a way that maintains confidence in its ability as the international organization for food standards. There are a number of important considerations in this context. A major issue for Codex is the length of time it takes to establish standards. Codex processes are too protracted and are not responsive to current expectations and public policy imperatives. Governments around the world are having to grapple with significant regulatory challenges and Codex, as the global food standards setting body, needs to be able to respond effectively and expeditiously through the development of internationally harmonized solutions to food safety and international trade matters. A refocusing of the manner in which the Commission and its subsidiary bodies produce outcomes must be a strategic priority. The key functions of a refocused Commission would be to:
  - provide strategic oversight, direction and cross coordination of the work programmes of all subsidiary bodies;
  - initiate new work and adopt standards and related texts against defined time frames;
  - provide a forum for discussion of selected contemporary food safety and regulatory policy issues;
  - make appropriate use of information technologies; and
  - promote consensus-based decision-making.
14. At the subsidiary body level, major improvements can be achieved through the establishment of time-limited procedures and through a review of the current step procedure. Timely development of standards will also require improved alignment of the timing and frequency of meetings of commodity and general subject committees.
15. As noted in the introductory sections, the parent bodies of the Commission accord high priority to food safety and international standards development programmes. Host governments also provide significant financial support. Ultimately, however, the ability of Codex to fulfil its mandate and respond to the growing needs and expectations of its members will depend on the availability of additional resources. Codex meetings and related activities already represent a heavy workload and further intensification of work will require additional financial and human resources.

**OBJECTIVE 5: PROMOTING MAXIMUM MEMBERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION**

16. Full participation by all Codex Members and other interested parties in the work of the CAC and its subsidiary bodies is now more important than ever. The participation of all members and relevant intergovernmental and non governmental organizations is critical to sound decision-making and ensuring that Codex standards and related texts take account of the full range of interest and viewpoints. Since the early nineties there has been a significant increase in the membership of Codex with developing countries now constituting a significant proportion of total membership. Notwithstanding this growth in membership many countries are still faced with serious financial and human resource constraints to effective participation in Codex activities. Achieving the objective of maximum participation will require specific and ongoing action to address the following:
  - **Resource** constraints- Early action is required to facilitate the effective participation of developing countries in Codex standards development activities, including financial assistance from extra-budgetary resources where possible;
  - **Capacity building** -There is a continuing need to invest in capacity building programmes, especially in developing countries aimed at strengthening national Codex administrative and consultative structures (e.g., Codex Contact Point and National Codex Committee) and provide for enhancing national capacity for technical analysis and participation in international standards development activities

by all interest groups. This requires bilateral or multilateral technical assistance and should include training.

17. In addition to actions to promote participation of member countries, the CAC also needs to continue its efforts to promote and facilitate the participation of consumers and public interest groups in its processes at the international level and encourage governments to take action at the national level. Given the strong public interest in food safety and regulatory issues, the involvement and input of consumers and non governmental groups at the international and national levels is essential to build public confidence in international standards and assure the strong public input, acceptance and support for Codex standards, guidelines and recommendations as a basis for domestic regulation and trade.

#### **OBJECTIVE 6: PROMOTING MAXIMUM APPLICATION OF CODEX STANDARDS**

18. As the pre-eminent international standards setting body for food, the CAC has a clear and strategic interest in promoting the maximum use of its standards both for domestic regulation and international trade. International harmonization based on Codex standards, guidelines and recommendations is essential to promoting a global approach to consumer health protection (including systems for the reduction of food-borne risks) and minimizing the negative effects of technical regulations on international trade. This will require sustained commitment and effort in the following key directions:
  - The Statements of Principle on the Role of Science in the Codex Decision-Making and the Extent to which Other Factors are Taken into Account<sup>6</sup> which provide the essential criteria for decision making in Codex, will require strong support and commitment by all countries if the statements are to become operationally effective both at international and national levels;
  - Codex must continue to promote the application of sound science and the principles of risk analysis on a consistent basis throughout its work as envisaged in the Commission's *Action Plan on Risk Analysis*<sup>7</sup>;
  - Codex processes must be inclusive and transparent and provide for participation and input from all interested groups both at the national and international level. This is particularly important given the interest and concern among Codex members to assure that Codex processes take due account of scientific uncertainties and the element of precaution. Transparency of the criteria and process of risk assessment and decision making will be paramount to achieving this objective;
  - The Commission must complete the strategic shift, first signalled at the 1991 FAO/WHO International Conference on Food Standards, Chemicals in Food and Food Trade, towards performance-based standards and guidelines for broad application across a range of commodities and focus on provisions essential for health protection of consumers and for the promotion of fair practices in food trade;
  - Codex must ensure that its standards and guidelines reflect the needs and special concerns of the developing world without compromising on the health of consumers;
  - Codex decisions should be based on consensus to the maximum extent possible;
  - The Codex Alimentarius Commission, whilst acknowledging that food safety standards cannot be compromised, should, when elaborating and deciding upon Codex standards and any related texts, take into consideration the special needs of developing countries including infrastructure, resources, technical and legal capabilities. Codex standards and related texts should not have the effect of creating unnecessary, unjustified or discriminatory obstacles to the exports of developing countries; and

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<sup>6</sup> Codex Alimentarius Commission, Procedural Manual, Eleventh Edition, p.180.

<sup>7</sup> Codex Alimentarius Commission, Report of 23rd session, Rome, 28 June-3 July 1999, p.10-11.

- Codex standards for food quality and safety, including labelling aspects, should be carefully prepared to ensure that they are not over-prescriptive and not more restrictive than necessary.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC VISION AND OBJECTIVES**

19. The strategic objectives described in this document will require a plan of action and implementation strategy. These matters will be addressed within the framework of the Medium Term Plan for 2003-2007.